



Environmental Compliance Branch **NEWS RELEASE**

For immediate release

*Contact: Lynda S. Pfau
Environmental Resource Coordinator
(910) 396-3341, ext. 357*

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VISIONARIES SET NEW COURSE FOR A SUSTAINABLE SANDHILLS

Wouldn't you like to live in a region where land use is the intentional, harmonious interplay of the natural and built environment? Or how about an area that is committed to valuing, protecting, and enhancing water quality and quantity for the future? And what of a community where affordable and renewable energy sources were offered? Who wouldn't want to call such a place home? And that is exactly what the Sustainable Sandhills Initiative is counting on.

More than 80 visionaries from throughout the Sandhills region recently attended a four-day Natural Step Training and Workshop to create a shared vision for the Sandhills region. Co-hosted by the North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and Fort Bragg, a challenge was issued to city and county planners, commissioners, council and chamber of commerce members, and other community leaders attending the workshop from Cumberland, Harnett, Hoke, Moore, Richmond, and Scotland counties, to envision what they would like the region to look like in 20-25 years. And given the current growth trends and the region's limited natural resources, would our children be able to enjoy the same quality of life we currently take for granted?

"We need you to collectively develop a vision for the Sandhills region," COL Addison "Tad" Davis said in his opening remarks. "We need you to collectively develop the paths that will move the region from "where we are now" to that "future vision" of a vibrant, thriving region where the quality of life is second to none."

William G. Ross, Secretary, NC DENR, told workshop participants the eyes of North Carolina were on them, and that the outcomes of this initiative would be the subject matter of stories their children, and children's children would tell.

"You are here to write the future story of the Sandhills region of North Carolina," Ross said. "Everyone here today will be the author of this story."

Davis also told participants their commitment would need to go beyond the workshop to keep the momentum going and by taking the necessary steps to turn the vision into a plan of action.

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“We have a great history of partnership in this region,” Davis said. “Successful efforts like the Regional Land Use Advisory Council, the Sandhills Conservation Partnership, and the Fayetteville Downtown Development Council to name a few, provide us with great starting points and references. Let’s build this partnership to embody our greatest vision for a Sustainable Sandhills.”

Brian and Mary Nattrass, world-renowned experts on sustainability and authors of “The Natural Step for Business” and “Dancing With the Tiger”, coached participants on the framework and criteria of sustainability. The Nattrass’ also gave a brief overview of several communities within the U.S. and Canada who have successfully employed sustainable practices into their every day way of doing business.

Following the training, participants broke up into human activity focus groups consisting of agriculture, commerce, development/growth, military, tourism, and transportation to discuss and define the impacts their respective industries had on the region’s quality of life. During this process, the discussion of impacts moved seamlessly from the human activity areas to how those same impacts affected environmental resources, mainly water, air, land use, materials/waste, and energy.

The following day, participants regrouped into air, water, materials, land use, and energy focus teams according to their area of expertise or interest. From there, each team developed a desired vision for their particular focus area and defined the current status. Goals included zero waste (leave no trace); a regional community committed to valuing protecting and enhancing water quality and quantity for the future; the need and desire for excellent health, green transportation choices, preservation of natural resources, and a thriving economy; reliable, affordable and renewable energy, as well as environmental integrity that supports a flourishing economy, vital communities and a high quality of life.

Teams went on to develop and prioritize the top three strategies to move them from the current reality to the desired end state, five-year objectives for each strategy were outlined, and a recruiting list from which to build a dream team for each focus. On the final day of the workshop, the vision, strategies and objectives from each focus team were presented to members of the Steering Committee.

Christine G. Hull, Ph.D., Fort Bragg Sustainability Planner, said Fort Bragg’s support and involvement in the Sustainable Sandhills Initiative is purposeful as well as proactive.

“In order for Fort Bragg to meet their primary mission, soldiers must receive realistic training, and training is linked to availability of the installation’s natural resources,” Hull said. “Our leadership knew changes had to be made in order to protect and sustain the natural resources. In working to change the way Fort Bragg does business day to day, we realized the installation could not succeed alone. The issues that affect readiness and the military quality of life are the same facing the Sandhills Region of North Carolina, home to Fort Bragg. Clean air, clean and plentiful water, land use, and related issues such as economic development, tourism and transportation, do not

stop or start at the installation fence line. It was clear that Sustainable Fort Bragg could not proceed without a Sustainable Sandhills region.”

Hull said while Fort Bragg was acting as a good steward to the environment by adopting the sustainable framework installation wide, it was also practicing a condition of sustainability; global citizenship – being a good neighbor to ensure that the mechanism’s that drive the local economics continue to support and strengthen the regional quality of life.

Over the next two months, members of the Sustainable Sandhills Steering Committee will meet to discuss the outcomes of the workshop and formally adopt a vision and regional objectives that will be presented to the communities-at-large at an Executive Conference this summer.

“The value of this process is that it moves the region forward by finding conservation driven approaches to meet the “quadruple bottom line” of economic growth, natural resource protection and enhancement, social equity, and protection of the military’s ability to perform its mission,” said Ross.

In a time when training and land available for training, on many military installations is impacted by environmental regulations, Fort Bragg has worked successfully at striking a balance between being good stewards of its resources while maintaining the readiness of the world’s Premier Power Projection Platform.

“This is only the beginning,” said Davis. “Everything we accomplished this week will build a foundation for the shared vision of this region in 25-30 years. The work begins when we go back to our daily jobs and daily contacts and start taking those steps toward the goals.”

For more information on the Sustainable Sandhills Initiative, contact Fort Bragg’s Regional Sustainability Coordinator, Rusty Harris-Bishop at 396-3341, ext 366.

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Sustainability experts, Mary and Brian Nattress, field questions.



Participants gather for a plenary session at the Natural Step Training Workshop.



COL Davis and SEC Ross, NC DENR, share a laugh at the regional training workshop.



COL Davis awards certificates to participants of the four-day workshop.



One of the five breakout groups work to develop a vision, strategies and objectives for the future of the Sandhills Region.